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FOREWORD

In a world filled with confusion and diverse interpretations of salvation, understanding the difference between law and grace in Christianity is of utmost importance. This book seeks to illuminate the profound truth that the grace of God, expressed through the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial work on the cross, has fulfilled the requirements of the law on our behalf. By grasping this essential concept, we can move beyond the fear and burden of legalism and embrace the freedom that comes through faith (trust) in Christ.

The Old Covenant, with its intricate laws and rituals, served a vital purpose in pointing to the ultimate mercy and redemption found in Jesus. His life, death, and resurrection not only satisfied the demands of the law but also inaugurated a New Covenant steeped in grace. This grace is not simply a pass for our shortcomings; instead, it is part of God's plan, which allows Him to live in us and make us into a new creation through Christ Jesus, despite our shortcomings. As you delve into the pages of this book, you will discover how this pivotal shift from law to grace can impact every aspect of your life as you learn to live in the rest that the Lord Jesus offers.

Join me as we explore the depths of God's grace and the freedom it offers to all who trust in Him and believe that what He did was enough. Through understanding our

identity in Christ, we can fully embrace the truth that we are no longer bound by the constraints of the Old Covenant, but are now welcomed into a loving relationship with God under the New Covenant, for which God shed His own blood on the cross. This book is an invitation to experience the richness of grace and to realize that what Jesus has done for us is more than enough. That truth is the foundation upon which all reality rests.

Truth and Spiritual Warfare

I want to begin this chapter by paraphrasing the late Dr. Michael Heiser. He once said, "Spiritual warfare is not screaming at demons." Dr. Heiser went on to explain the reality that, instead, spiritual warfare is plainly knowing the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and accepting it. This, of course, is both a heartfelt and accurate statement. So, if knowing the Gospel is, in fact, our main weapon in spiritual warfare, then we must ask ourselves: what is the actual Gospel? One would think that the answer to this should be simple, and it certainly is. Yet, you will find that there are many interpretations of the Gospel that are, unfortunately, in direct opposition to what the Word of God explains it to be. Since the Gospel is simple to comprehend, a reasonable person might wonder why there is so much confusion in our culture about its meaning.

Before we discuss the meaning of the Gospel, we need to address why there is confusion about it in the first place. The enemy of all mankind, to whom I will simply refer as ha-satan (which means "the accuser" in Hebrew), lives in deep fear of people having a relationship with the Lord Jesus and thereby being indwelt by His Holy Spirit. Because of that, he and those fallen members of the spiritual realm who work with him labor intensely to create uncertainty about the Gospel.

They do this to prevent people from knowing their God and what He, the Lord, has done for us.

This is because as there is an increase in the number of people who have a relationship with the Lord, the closer we all get to what the Scripture refers to as the "fullness of the gentiles" according to prophecy. It is this fullness of the gentiles that precedes the second coming of Christ Jesus. Furthermore, the second coming of the Lord is the precursor to the enemy's final ruin. While the judgment of God against the enemy is not immediate following the second coming, it is still quite near according to holy Scripture. The enemy is aware that when this happens, his own time to inflict harm upon us is nearly over.

The accuser is conscious of this fact and is terrified of what that means for himself in the face of God's coming judgment of him. In short, the devil is doomed, and he knows it. The enemy's fear of the fullness of the gentiles makes more sense to us once we comprehend this in light of the grand timeline of prophecy. What is this penalty that the enemy fears so much? Simply put, it is a judgment that ends with the devil in a bottomless pit and eternal separation from both God and any meaningful reality. He will be forever tormented for what he has done to the children of God and the harm that he has caused thereby.

Therefore, we must realize that the current spiritual warfare in which we are engaged is not figurative, but is rather quite literal. The Scripture tells us in Ephesians 6:12 (English Standard Version) (ESV) the following: *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* This war is fought at many levels and in various ways throughout the world. Nevertheless, at its core, God seeks to rescue and restore His children, while the enemy hopes to steer them away from salvation with lies. Sadly, many of these lies are expressed and believed by an assortment of congregations from different religious traditions. This is the warfront where the accuser sees many opportunities to attack the truth at its foundation, leading people away from a relationship with the living God and into a religion of self-help instead.

Now that we have identified the ongoing dynamic, we can explore the truth of the Gospel. This, in turn, will help us spot the lies of the enemy as we encounter them, so that those lies may be put to rest. Let's approach this the way we would, a simple math problem. In mathematics, an equation can yield many wrong answers, but it can only be solved with one right answer. If we establish the right answer, then the wrong answers become more obvious. Therefore, let us begin with the equation. The

problem that needed to be solved began in the Garden of Eden.

God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden. The Garden itself was an outpost of heaven on earth. It was a place where heavenly creatures and earthly creatures commingled. The entire Earth was not Eden, as some have supposed. Instead, much of the Earth was expressed in the Hebrew language as "tohu wa-bohu." This can be used to describe a wild and untamed land. It can also describe a wasteland in other aspects. It can simply mean something to the effect of a land that is in need of cultivation. The term can be expressed in many different ways. Nevertheless, what it does not describe is an Edenic world. Therefore, we can see that the rest of the world was not like Eden. Nor was Eden, in its entirety, a Garden. Rather, the Garden was placed inside of Eden.

God's plan was to make the rest of the world like Eden, with the man and woman in charge of the Earth. This was to be the dominion of the human children of God. God gave them, as His children, the right to rule over the Earth and His authority through them to do so. In their unfallen form, the children of mankind were to be emissaries of the Lord God in their function as they lived their lives as His children.

While the heavenly beings (which are sometimes referred to as angels) rejoiced over this, it is obvious that this situation became a temptation for at least one heavenly being who wanted to establish his own kingdom through the dominion of mankind. This is where we see the enemy first appear on the scene, in a manner that seeks to lead mankind away from the Lord God and to himself instead. While there was likely more than one motivation for the enemy's decision, some motivations seem more obvious than others.

The enemy certainly wanted his own kingdom but knew that he could not take possession of the Earth by his own power or authority. Nor could he take possession of the earthly realm by usurping the authority of God Himself. The enemy is a created being and does not have equal capacity to the living God. In fact, the enemy is a lesser being and by no means equal to God. So what was the next best strategy for the enemy, since direct conflict was a losing battle?

The most productive strategy for him would be to usurp the authority of Adam through manipulation. If he could get Adam to listen to him rather than to God, then he could bend the dominion given to Adam to his own will. In that respect, he would set up his own kingdom and become a little god. There is so much more that could be said about this, but this is the situation in a nutshell. So how did this first manipulation take shape? To explain

that, we must first pay a visit to the center of the Garden of Eden itself.

In the Garden, God placed two trees. The first tree was the tree of life. This represented a relationship with God as the Father and Creator of Adam and Eve, with them being His children made in His image. The second tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, represented the abandonment of that relationship with God, and instead living in a transactional arrangement with Him through rule-following. We read the following in Genesis 2:17 (ESV): *"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* While Adam would live to be 930 years old after eating from the wrong tree, the immediate death that God was referring to was spiritual death. That death resulted from the Holy Spirit no longer living in Adam upon his decision to initiate a divorce with the living God. For the living God had breathed into Adam beforehand the "Nishmat Chayim," which in Hebrew means the Spirit Of Life and/or Lives. This is another way of referring to the Ruach of God, which is the Holy Spirit of the Lord Himself.

In simplest terms, the tree of life signifies the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within a person, while the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a symbol of trying to become like God through performance. The first tree offers true life through love. The second tree offers

spiritual death through divorcing the Holy Spirit and marrying a merit-based system as an inadequate substitute.

God told Adam that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was for God alone. He said this because God knew that only He Himself was capable of handling the burden of that kind of fruit. In other words, only God is able to live up to His own standards of performance, if such were the tool of measure. That is why He never endorsed the idea of performance as a requirement for having a relationship with Him. It was this fact that the enemy would eventually attempt to exploit as events unfolded.

In medieval depictions of the Garden scene involving the enemy, he is often portrayed as an earthly snake. However, this is a poor understanding of what the enemy actually is in his natural form that God gave him. The enemy belongs to a class of spiritual beings known as seraphim. The root word, “seraph,” essentially means “burning one.” This word depicts a fiery heavenly being and is not used in this context as an earthly snake. The term was adapted to refer to earthly snakes at times because their bites often produced a burning sensation at the wound site of the victim. In this regard, the earthly snake possesses one of its attributes compared to that of the heavenly seraphim.

One might wonder what one of the roles of the seraphim in the heavenly realm might be. They acted as throne guardians who protected sacred space. This is not because God needs protection—far from it. Rather, they served as guards who prevented other beings from entering a space for which they were not yet prepared. Otherwise, they could be unintentionally harmed in certain circumstances. For example, Scripture tells us that God, in His uncreated and eternal form, is the one through whom all creation and life come. He Himself dwells, according to Scripture, in unapproachable light. Therefore, in order to make Himself known and knowable to His creation, He has to extend Himself in some way from this natural condition into a form that created beings can interact with. This means manifesting Himself out of the unapproachable light. Otherwise, neither His heavenly nor earthly children would ever get to see Him. The seraphim were there, in part, to ensure that others did not mistakenly wander too close to this unapproachable aspect of the Lord. In short, God simply doesn't want His children to be harmed.

So He established a mechanism to help prevent this from happening by assigning the task of guarding sacred space to the seraphim. The enemy was one of the members of this group of guardians, and Adam and Eve would have been quite aware of this even in Eden. After all, Eden was an outpost and an extension of heaven on earth.

There are many other roles that heavenly beings are also assigned. Sometimes, heavenly beings may have multiple assignments. One such role exists within the court system of the spiritual realm. As in any court system, there is a judge, a prosecutor, an advocate, and a jury. In the heavenly court system, the Lord our God is the judge. The prosecutorial role in Hebrew is referred to as ha-satan, which we've already established earlier meaning "the accuser." The divine council in heaven serves as a jury, of which we ourselves will one day be a part according to Scripture.

There are many prosecutors in heaven, not just one. These roles are meant to be good and not evil. However, one particular seraph (burning throne guardian) who also has a prosecutorial role is the one who would later rebel and enter the Garden scene with Adam and Eve. In modern terms, we simply refer to him as the devil. The word "devil" derives from a term that means to harass or to worry others. It should be said that this is not the proper role of a true prosecutor in the heavenly court system; rather, it is an aberration of it.

Even in the human world, we know the difference between good and evil prosecutors in our own court systems. There are those prosecutors who seek to protect the victims of a crime and punish the perpetrators accordingly, while hoping to help them become

rehabilitated. We are also aware that there are evil prosecutors in earthly court systems as well.

There are those evil prosecutors who are simply in it for their careers, what they can get out of the system, or to attain some level of achievement through self-service rather than service to others. The enemy, whom we will now simply call the devil, is one of these prosecutors who, by his own free will, has chosen the path of self-service by any evil means necessary.

There in the Garden, the devil sees his opportunity to set himself up as a little god by first deceiving Eve. He tempts Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At first, she resists and says that this will end in death. Yet the enemy questions her by asking if this is indeed what God had said. Why would he question her in this manner? God had first relayed that information to Adam, and Adam provided it to Eve.

Knowing that Eve was hearing this truth from God through Adam, the enemy used this as an opportunity to sow doubt in her mind and deceive her. He asked her, "Are you sure God said you would die?" The enemy then goes on to lie to her and tell her that God knows that if she eats of this tree, her eyes will be opened, and she will know the difference between what is good and what is evil, and essentially she will be just like God. This, of course, was a lie.

Nevertheless, the temptation to acquire something that we, as people, think we are missing out on is a very real temptation for any of us. If we believe that others are trying to keep us from obtaining something we want, we can develop a fear of missing out (FOMO). Even if what we are missing out on is destructive, we can let this fear get the better of us.

The enemy presented this opportunity to Eve, suggesting that if a person knows the difference between good and evil, both she and Adam can choose to do what is good and avoid what is evil, and then they will be just like God Himself. It was at this moment that the tree, which would bring death, became taboo and interesting to the eye, rather than deadly, as it actually was.

The fear that Eve experienced was the fear of missing out on being like God, or at least that is what she likely thought. Scripture tells us that fear of such things comes from the devil. There are many passages that explain how the enemy favors fear as a weapon. In contrast, God's perfect love casts out fear, but a person won't recognize that if they do not believe the truth that God loves them totally and perfectly.

We read in 2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV): *"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."* Therefore, the fear of missing out that Eve experienced was not from God, but from the enemy instead. Even in

passages of Scripture that tell us to fear the Lord our God, they do not use fear in the modern sense, as we think of it today. Rather, such passages use the word fear to mean respect and reverence, and certainly not terror. It is simply an old linguistic way of using the word differently than what we are often used to in the modern age.

Instead of being a protector of his wife Eve, as he should have been, Adam became a partaker in eating the fruit that would bring death. He had the opportunity to step into the situation and, no doubt, cast the serpent out of the Garden and possibly even Eden. We can surmise this because Adam had been given dominion over the earthly realm. Instead, he waited to see what would happen to Eve before making the choice himself. Essentially, he used Eve's decision as an experiment before making his own. This is one of the reasons why the curse given to Adam was greater than that given to his wife.

Nevertheless, the worst aspect of all of this was their instantaneous divorce from the Holy Spirit of the Lord God. At that moment, they truly died spiritually and were no longer who they were meant to be. Rather than choosing to live as God's children under His perfect love and the giving of Himself to them, they opted to live in a transactional way instead.

This transactional approach can be defined as a person telling God that they no longer want His unconditional love and instead prefer to earn it through performance. This was not a way that the Lord our God was willing to live with His children. God made them to be His kids, not His employees. From this point, humanity would choose a path of performance to earn blessings rather than embracing grace and mercy for the purpose of living in the unconditional love and rest which God offers.

Why would a person make such a decision? For the most part, it stems from a development of pride. It's a way for a person to declare that they will get there on their own and are not interested in help. However, this is a ludicrous decision. The only way any of us will ever be like God, is if God Himself lives inside us and thereby imparts His perfect love to us.

The Living And The Dead

God has countless attributes, but He can certainly be described as the source of all love. The only way to become like our God, who loves us, is to have that same God of love living in us. Otherwise, God remains external, and we are always reaching to grasp the person who is meant to live on the inside. No amount of rule-following, repentance, or obedience can achieve this for us, no matter how many laws we live under. This is because we are not capable of being perfect without the perfect God living in us.

Even if we pretended there existed an alternate reality where a person living without the Holy Spirit, was somehow able to follow the whole Law of God, it still wouldn't matter. All they would essentially be, is a high-performing, spiritually dead person. The Holy Spirit truly is the spirit of life. Without the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we simply are not alive to God, in the way that matters within the grand scheme of things. The Lord did not desire to create a bunch of spiritual zombies. He wants us to be His living children. As we will see throughout Scripture, our God has pulled out all the stops to restore to us what was lost in the Garden rebellion. After all, as the perfect parent, God wants us to have everything we need for life, which means giving us Himself.

This new condition of being spiritually dead and therefore incomplete in our beings, sums up the present situation of humanity following the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. While Adam and Eve were originally made in the image of God, we ourselves have been born into the image of Adam and his rebellion. Therefore, until the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us as individuals, we continue to exist in the image of Adam's fallen state.

This is something that God, out of His love for us, wanted to rectify in order to make us whole again. He provided the means for that through His own sacrifice on the cross. Scripture says in Genesis 3:15 (ESV), *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* This is the first prophecy in Scripture, telling us that it will be the Lord God Himself, manifesting in the flesh, who will rescue His children. He would do so by saving them from eternal death and, thereby, restoring to them His Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit that had been lost in Adam.

It is here that we see the problem and the needed solution. We can see the problem of spiritual death due to humanity divorcing the Holy Spirit in the rebellion. We can also understand the need to have our sins forgiven and to be restored to life by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. Yet, it is often the mechanics of this that get missed and are not explained well in most religious

congregations. In other words, how does the Lord Jesus dying for us on the cross and, paying for our sins, produce salvation through the restoration of the Holy Spirit? Many would assume that the Lord Jesus forgiving our sins is salvation. However, this is not so much incorrect as it is an incomplete statement.

As Pastor Aaron Budjen from Living God Ministries has often said, it is the forgiveness of sins that makes salvation possible, but that is not salvation itself. Let me explain, in the best way that I can, what is meant by this statement, as Pastor Budjen has described. If the Lord Jesus came and died for our sins but did not restore to us the Holy Spirit, then all we would be is a bunch of forgiven dead people. Subsequently, if the Lord Jesus had simply restored the Holy Spirit to us without paying for our sins first, then the Holy Spirit would have to depart the moment a person sinned again. Therefore, by dying for our sins first and paying for them totally with His innocence, He is able to restore the Holy Spirit to us in a manner where the Holy Spirit would never have to depart, even when we sin again, as we certainly will.

We read in Romans 6:10 (ESV): *"For the death he died, he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God."* In other words, the sin issue between the Lord God and us really is at an end. Regardless, of what some false teacher might tell you, this is not giving us a license to commit sin. It is simply to say that the Lord

God no longer holds our sins against us, whether they are in our past, our present, or our future in this life. He will never depart from us when we do evil if we acknowledge Him as our Savior, after which the Holy Spirit will indwell us.

This is because, after the cross, there really is no sin at all that we can commit, no matter how awful, that will cause the Holy Spirit to depart from us. That doesn't mean that sinful behavior itself is approved by God. In fact, it is so awful and evil that it took the death of the living God of all creation to pay for it. While the Lord will certainly not hold our sins against us if we are in Him, that doesn't mean that He still won't have something to say about it. After all, it was His blood that had to be shed for it. I certainly think we can all agree that He has the right to comment on what we do, even though He no longer judges us based on those things.

Since all sin for all of humanity, regardless of whether they accept the Lord, is truly paid for, does this mean there is universal salvation for all? The answer to that is a simple no. Remember, the Lord paying for our sins allows for the Holy Spirit to indwell those who acknowledge their need for forgiveness. The Lord God will never force that on anyone. In order to have the Holy Spirit dwell within a person, they must first come to acknowledge a few simple things.

The first is that they must recognize that they really are sinful in their behavior and dead to Christ, as they lack the Holy Spirit. Secondly, they must acknowledge that what the Lord did to forgive their sins through the cross is totally adequate on its own, and that they themselves cannot contribute anything to what the Lord has already done for them. In other words, there is nothing they can do to merit any favor from God within themselves and thus earn their forgiveness.

What matters is what the Lord has done for them, and not what they can do for the Lord, through repentance and obedience. This is because we can never repent enough or be obedient enough to earn forgiveness. Even if we could do so perfectly, it could not pay for what we have already done. Only God is big enough to do that for us. If a person accepts these simple truths, then the Holy Spirit will automatically dwell within them, because they are, in effect, accepting the Lord when they believe this reality.

Once a person comes to the point where they are saved, they are saved indeed. Everything that happens after that pertains to maturing in Christ. One does not have to mature in Christ in order to remain in Christ. Rather, maturing is simply a process of growing in the knowledge of the love that the living God has for us. Even this adds nothing to our salvation. Instead, it is merely a state of being that will go on for all eternity.

The reason why this will go on for all eternity, is that God is truly endless in what we can discover about Him. This truth is meant to inspire excitement. There will never be an opportunity for boredom with our God. There will always be something about Him and the expansion of our relationship with Him that will be new and ever-growing. What we should do is learn to live in the rest that He offers us for all eternity.

The Lord has referred to this concept of rest and our living in it many times throughout the Scriptures. He has also acknowledged in the Old Testament the fact that many would never choose to live in that rest by their own free will. What is this rest? In a nutshell, it is a rest from our attempts at working toward becoming righteous, as opposed to simply living within the righteousness which is the true righteousness that He gives to us by joining us to His identity. Living in the Lord's rest is not a requirement for salvation.

If we were to suggest that it were a requirement, this would simply be another attempt to assert our efforts at achieving something as a form of merit that supports the cross of Christ. In other words, it would be a way of saying that we are doing something that somehow aids us in salvation. Instead, rest in this context is a completely separate subject and is downstream from salvation, not a requirement for it.

Consider the rebellion in the wilderness during the 40-year wandering after the children of Israel had been delivered from Egypt. They murmured and strived to achieve holiness outside of God through their own works and efforts. Because of their stubbornness and their refusal to simply trust God that He could do what they needed, they rebelled. In short, by their attitudes and actions, they were telling God that they could achieve righteousness on their own. This was the same lie from the enemy that Adam and Eve believed in the Garden rebellion. Are you beginning to notice a trend?

In Psalm 95:11 (ESV), the Lord says, *"Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"* This isn't God decreeing that He is going to prevent them from living in His rest; rather, it is an assessment of the fact that they are refusing to, and He isn't going to make them. This has to be a free will choice. We either accept that what God does for us is sufficient based on His trustworthiness and ability, or we choose not to accept it.

This choice is something that we are still faced with to this very day when it comes to the issue of salvation. Are we going to trust that what the Lord Jesus did for us was enough or not? Or are we going to refuse to believe and try to add to His sacrifice with our works? If a person believes that he must somehow attain salvation by his own efforts, he is indeed not saved, because he is trying to save himself.

If, on the other hand, they do believe God, then there is a secondary strategy with which the enemy might attack them. The secondary form is one that saved people often encounter, and it certainly doesn't mean that they are not saved just because they are wrestling with this. What is that secondary form? We will call it "FEAR." This form of fear pertains to worrying that God is displeased with them and that they are out of fellowship with Him.

This usually happens because a person has a sin or several sins that they are still struggling with, and they are afraid that God does not approve of them. Now, just because they have this type of fear doesn't mean that they aren't saved; it just means that they're saved and confused. This is a normal condition that most saved people will experience, and it is nothing new or anything to be afraid of. It's simply a way for the enemy to harass that believer, so they are paralyzed with fear rather than relaxing in the fact that the Lord loves them regardless of what they do, whether what they are doing is good or bad.

Think of it this way: even in the purely human realm, there are some parents who do love their children unconditionally. There may not be many that do, but there are some. Those parents who truly love their kids in this manner may not always approve of their children's behavior. Nevertheless, they never reject their children at heart. Is our God not more capable than we are of

unconditional love? Of course, He is. For what we call unconditional love among us as human beings is still, at best, a very imperfect form of unconditional love, and at worst, not unconditional at all. However, the living God does not have our failures or shortcomings. When He says His love is unconditional, it is truly unconditional, and no one should think otherwise.

Doubting God's Unconditional Love

One of the reasons people doubt God's unconditional love for them is that they often superimpose their own shortcomings onto the Lord. They assume that because they are unmerciful, then God must also be unmerciful. They also suppose that because they do not love perfectly, God also does not love perfectly. As the old saying goes, "God made man in His own image, and we have been trying to return the favor ever since. Yet God, who manifested in the flesh as the Lord Jesus, does indeed love us perfectly. He followed the law to perfection and sacrificed Himself on our behalf.

When it comes to following God's law, there are no participation trophies being handed out. We either succeed at it, or we don't. For example, consider what the Lord Jesus says regarding adultery alone. We read in Matthew 5:27-28 (ESV): *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* This is just one of many examples that the Lord gives following His "Sermon on the Mount". He would also go on to describe that if a person has hateful anger toward another, this is the same as being guilty of murder, and so on. Furthermore, the Lord tells us in Matthew 5:20 (ESV): *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter*

the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, when it comes to trying to achieve righteousness by the mere constraint of the flesh, we will never see the kingdom of heaven. This is because we are not capable of constraining it perfectly. So what choice is the Living God left with for us if we are to be restored to Him for our sake? What God can choose is simple enough even for us to understand.

Just like the Scripture tells us that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits us, the same could be said for the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf. What He did for us is not merely sufficient; it is overly sufficient. His sacrifice isn't merely equal to our sins; it is quite literally greater than our sins. Please do not allow any false teacher, pastor, preacher, priest, rabbi, or any other person to deceive you into thinking that what the Lord Jesus did for you is not enough on its own. Anyone who does so is merely parroting the same lie out of Hell that was preached in the Garden of Eden by the devil.

If in every congregational meeting you attend (or what someone calls a church), there is the teaching of lies, then simply turn around and leave. You would be better off countering the lies by sitting down with one or two friends in a café and talking about the Scripture and studying together. This is how you overcome the lies that are being told and spread the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Misunderstanding The Old Covenant

One of the reasons why many people are under the false belief that it requires work on our part in order to please God is that they don't understand the difference between the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant". In general, most don't even realize what the "Old Covenant" was for. A person will read all the blessings in the "Old Covenant" that the Lord our God offered to the children of Israel if they performed well, and all the curses if they failed to perform correctly, and assume that this is what God intended for them and all of humanity in the end.

In other words, people think that God expects us to do good works and then receive good rewards in return as the model for all eternity. In fact, God never actually desired this kind of arrangement at all because He knew it would end in total failure due to our own inadequacies in meeting His standards. As strange as it may sound, that was the actual point of the "Old Covenant". It was God's way of giving us the best rules possible in order to show us that we were not capable of following them. Therefore, we would have to rely completely on His grace and mercy in order to save us.

As others have said, the Lord our God, by giving the rules and regulations of the "Old Covenant", contributed to mankind's effort to achieve righteousness through rule-following. This decision dates back to the Garden of

Eden when Adam and Eve abandoned their relationship with God, and pursued a transactional way of life in an attempt to become like God through performance. This decision, of course, was madness. We can only become like the living God if the living God dwells within us through relationship and makes us like Him by His love, not by our efforts. So in the "Old Covenant", the Lord would offer His contribution to our efforts of rule following by giving us His law. He did this while hoping to show us that our plan would never work. It couldn't work, because we are unable to follow the law with perfection.

He knew that by doing this, it would actually stir up more sin in a person's life, not less. This isn't because God was encouraging us to commit sin, but He knew that the enemy would use this opportunity to make things that were forbidden by the law taboo, and therefore appear more interesting than they actually are. Paul spoke of this in the following passages. Romans 5:20-21 (ESV): *"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* In later passages, the Apostle Paul elaborates on this further as we read on. He says in Romans 7:7-8 (ESV): *"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have*

known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead."

This was, by no means, God manipulating humanity. Rather, this was God using the law as a mirror for humanity to see into, in a manner that causes us to face the reality of our flaws. If a person is honest with himself and observes their own behavior while considering the condition of their heart, they will walk away with the realization that they will never reach perfection through performance.

The law is the mirror that exposes and reflects the reality of the situation. However, the law cannot cleanse us of our sins or restore to us our relationship with the Holy Spirit that was lost in Adam. The law reveals our condition, but only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the blood that was shed for us can cleanse us of our sins. It is only our willingness to believe God that makes us righteous before Him. It is only the restoration of His indwelling Holy Spirit in us that makes us spiritually alive. The law cannot accomplish any of these things.

When Jesus came and began His ministry here on earth, He did so at a time that was absolutely critical, not only for the world, but also for the nation of Israel, as a result of their falling away from the truth. The nation of Israel

was set up for many purposes related to God's plan to restore humanity. One of those specific aspects focused on God's decision to provide the world with oracles who would maintain the knowledge of who the living God is. There had been an explosion of paganism following the Tower of Babel incident that we find in Genesis Chapter 11. For a better understanding of that subject, I would refer you to the work of Dr. Michael Heiser and his book, The Unseen Realm. Yet paganism was not the only problem facing the world when it came to the truth and knowledge of the living God.

The Jews were also experiencing their own internal personal battles by the time of Christ's arrival because they wrongly believed that they were living just fine according to the "Mosaic (as in Old) Covenant." It was at this time that the Pharisees and Sadducees had established what they thought was a bulwark of extra laws surrounding the Levitical system, which they believed would guarantee that a person would be righteous with God through behavior rather than through a relationship with Him.

In short, they were almost in a worse spiritual state than they would have been during Israel's history of apostasy. During the times prior to the northern kingdom being carried away and the later exile of the southern kingdom into Babylon, the Israelite people knew that they were under judgment because they had turned away from

God. Because of that awareness, it was easy for them to see where they had gone wrong.

It is often easier for a person who is aware of their shortcomings to turn back to the truth than it is for a person with religious pride to recognize that they actually need the love and mercy of God. While this is ironic in many ways, it is still a very factual statement. The Pharisees and Sadducees, in their beliefs, epitomized this reality. They honestly believed that they were righteous before God due to their performance. Jesus, on the other hand, explained to them that this simply was not true because one can never attain righteousness through performance, as human beings are not capable of performing perfectly.

Jesus expressed this in the “Sermon on the Mount” and in many other places. During His sermon, He preached the “Old Covenant” while preparing the world for the “New Covenant” to come. Most people today, when they think of the Lord's sermon, believe that what Jesus was expressing was how we are to conduct ourselves presently. Yet, that was not what the Lord was doing. Rather, He was preaching the Mosaic law because that was what was still in effect at that time.

In fact, He was preaching it in such a way as to show the people that their righteousness, should they choose to attempt it by performance, would have to exceed the

righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. This, of course, is impossible, as God has always known it to be. So why then would the Lord suggest that we do the impossible? He did so in order to give us an “in-your-face” moment where we had to come to grips with the reality that we are simply incapable of achieving righteousness by what we do. The bottom line is that His sermon proved that in order to be righteous by works, a person would have to be as perfect as God.

The intent of this is to drive the hearer into a productive form of despair. Once a person realizes that they can no longer fool themselves into believing that they are somehow in right standing with the living God by what they do, then they have no choice but to throw themselves on the grace and mercy that He offers. That was the point that the Lord Jesus was driving home during that sermon and at many other times. The struggle for most people today, even those who call themselves Christians, is that they don't understand the difference between the covenants to begin with, nor do they fully grasp the distinctions between the concepts that we find in them.

In part, this comes from a struggle to understand the difference between atonement and propitiation. Many people believe that atonement is forgiveness when they read the Levitical laws. Yet, atonement is actually the opposite of forgiveness. To atone for something means

to remember it. Propitiation, on the other hand, is forgiveness through payment and the forgetting of the debt. Our sins are so serious that we were instructed to memorialize them during the “Old Covenant” until they can be paid for by God Himself on our behalf, and therefore remembered no more in the “New Covenant” to come. This is such a tough issue for many people living in the world today that I believe it's necessary to devote the following chapter or chapters to discussing the difference between the two.

Backdrop To The “Old Covenant”

In order to really understand the “Old Covenant”, atonement, and propitiation, we need to first distinguish the difference between ritualistic uncleanness and uncleanness as the result of sin. These two types of being unclean, so to speak, are quite different from one another. The “Old Covenant” only ever addresses the ritual aspect but could never address the spiritual aspect. The “New Covenant” on the other hand, addresses the spiritual aspect and thereby dissolves the need to further deal with the ritual aspect. This is because the blood of Jesus makes us both spiritually clean totally and permanently, and thereby ritualistically clean totally and permanently by default. In order to prove these points, let's explore the subject in a bit more detail.

In the Scriptures, to be unclean comes in two different forms. Primarily, there is spiritual uncleanness that comes from the commission of sin. Secondly, there is ritualistic uncleanness, which results from common daily practices that make a person temporarily unfit for sacred space. In order to explain the difference between the two, we need to analyze what is meant by sacred space. Many times in the Scriptures, the world is described in a manner that would lead a modern Western reader to think that the Word of God is describing something like a flat earth regarding geography.

The Scriptures, instead, are describing what is known as cosmic geography. This cosmic geography lists places concerning their degree of life and God's active presence, and does not describe the same thing as physical geography. For example, heaven is above, the earth is below, and the underworld is beneath. This isn't describing a physical representation of reality, but rather a representation of the life that exists within reality. God's throne is in the heavenly realm, and God is the source of all life. Therefore, heaven is above in terms of life-giving importance in reference to God's enthroned presence.

Earth, or the earthly realm, is a place where God is active but is less physically visible to us unless there is a theophany. The term "theophany" simply means God showing His presence within an embodied form, such as He did with Abraham and on other occasions throughout Scripture. The underworld is a place where God's physical presence is less represented. Since God is everywhere, we know that there is no place where He cannot be. However, that doesn't mean that He gives His full attention to certain specific places under certain conditions. In some cases, He will withdraw His attention, which means anyone in such a place would regard that as hell.

The underworld (or, if you were to use the Hebrew term, "Sheol") was broken down into at least two separate sides. There was the bosom of Abraham, where God

provided His attention and comfort to those who were waiting for the Messiah to come and reverse death. Then there was also what we would consider the bad side, or what we think of in modern terms as hell. For this concept, remember the parable that Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus. After dying, Lazarus was in the bosom of Abraham, where he was comforted, while the rich man was in torment. A great chasm separated the two different sides, so that neither could cross from one to the other.

Much more could be said about the concept of the underworld and the realm of the dead, but we will leave that as a topic for another time, as there are other aspects to the negative side that could be discussed. We do know, however, that the bosom of Abraham, after the resurrection of Jesus, was taken directly into heaven in a tangible way. Regardless, the bosom of Abraham even before the resurrection of Jesus, was the paradise that Jesus spoke of to the thief on the cross.

This may seem long and drawn out, but it's important to understand this in terms of sacred space. The underworld is below in cosmic geography, in regard to the state of life that is there, versus the state of life on earth, and certainly the state of life in heaven. This is where we will now begin to expound on the differences between uncleanness as the result of sin, and uncleanness in regard to ritual practice.

Regarding sacred space, the Garden in Eden was an outpost of heaven on Earth. It is the blueprint for the new heaven and Earth to come, that we see written about in the book of Revelation. This was God's plan as the Scripture lays this out, meaning that God always planned to combine the heavenly and earthly together. Just like in the Garden of Eden, where heavenly creatures and earthly creatures commingled in quite a natural way, this again will happen on a wider scale in the future when God brings heaven to Earth. Where God dwells, is indeed sacred space. His throne is sacred space, as also heaven is sacred space. Even here on earth, there are places where in the Old Testament, God declared to be sacred, such as the inner portion of the Tabernacle where He would reside and converse with Moses.

Furthermore, the physical body of those of us who are in Christ, is now considered sacred space, because the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us. Our bodies are literally the temple of God, where we live in community with God in a relationship with the Godhead through the Holy Spirit. One might wonder what any of this has to do with ritualistic uncleanness? At this point, we will begin tying it together. Following the time of the Exodus, God explained to Moses how the Tabernacle would be constructed, as well as the ritual cleanliness practices that had to be done before a person could enter the Tabernacle. These ritual formalities had to be done before entering the innermost portion, known as the Holy

of Holies. Later, once a physical temple was built by Solomon, these specific practices would have to continue.

Such observances would have included things like, washing one's body after having touched the carcass of a dead animal, before a person could enter sacred space. Touching the carcass of an animal was not a sin, nor did it make a person spiritually unclean, but it did make them unclean in terms of their allowance into sacred space.

This was meant to be a physical signpost that was supposed to make a person stop and think about how valuable the presence of God is in their life. For example, if we do something that makes us physically dirty on the outside, it might make us stop and reflect on how spiritual dirty we might be on the inside, and hopefully inspire us to think about how the inside could be cleaned. Again, this was meant to be a map to self-reflection and thought.

Uncleanliness as a result of sin, I'm sure, is self-explanatory to all of us. We all have a need to be cleansed of our sins and to be made permanently clean on the inside of our souls in some way. Yet, we cannot cleanse our souls with water and a bath cloth.

This brings us now to the Levitical system of laws that we see in Scripture. Much like the Ten Commandments, the Levitical laws were broken into two different categories. One category addressed sins and how to atone for them until forgiveness could be granted by the Messiah, while the other category focused on ritualistic uncleanness and how one might be made ritualistically clean so that they could enter sacred space, such as the temple, for example.

This was meant to drive people to what should be called “productive despair.” If we constantly need to be cleaned on the outside just to enter sacred space, how can we ever be made permanently clean on the inside so that certain practices would no longer be required? This was meant to make a person reflect on their inward self and wonder how they, being dirty on the inside as a sinful person, can be made permanently clean so that they can live in communion with God—especially in a way where the Holy Spirit would never depart. The answer to this, of course, is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

From this point forward, we will observe how the Levitical law system and its concepts of atonement and forgiveness were always pointing to the Messiah who was promised to come. For it is only the Messiah who could not only atone for our sins but also forgive our sins in order to make us fit for sacred space—both ritualistically and, more importantly, for permanent

communion with God. Now let us move on to the concepts of atonement and forgiveness, what they are, and why one is more important than the other. This has to be understood first by the believer in Christ to really know who we are in Him. With that in mind, let's now turn to atonement.

Atonement And Propitiation

(Atonement)

Unlike forgiveness, atonement is not the washing away of sins. In fact, it is the exact opposite. It is a way of memorializing sin so that it can be remembered and not forgotten, at least for a time. In Leviticus, we find that the priest would offer sacrifices for the sins of Israel at least once a year and daily sacrifices for various individuals, no less than twice a day.

If a person committed a sin against God or against someone else in conjunction, then they were, of course, guilty before the law of God handed down to Moses. For this reason, people would approach the priests to offer sacrifices that the priest would then carry out on their behalf to atone for the sin. This was so that it could be remembered by the person until the Messiah would come to wash the sin or sins away. Sacrifices were also offered for ritualistic uncleanness. One example of this would be if a person ate an animal that was considered ritualistically unclean; they could provide a sin offering through the priest to God. Then they could be made ritualistically clean again before entering the temple.

These sorts of sacrifices were made twice a day: once in the morning and once in the evening. This would consist of both a blood offering and a burnt offering. With regard to a blood offering and burnt offering, let's look at

something simple. If a person commits a sin, they are both spiritually unclean and simultaneously ritualistically unclean. The most inexpensive animal available to poor people for sacrifice would have been two turtle-doves. These are, of course, young pigeons. One turtle-dove would have its neck rung, but not to the point that the head would be detached. Rather, only to the point where it would die, and a wound would appear around the neck so that it would begin to bleed.

This blood was sprinkled over the altar and, in some situations, over other sacred objects. The other turtle-dove would be offered as a burnt offering, usually for the purpose of rendering the person ritualistically clean again. This way, despite their sins, they could reenter the temple. This practice occurred virtually nonstop for centuries that would span from the early Tabernacle period as well as the first and second temple periods. At a minimum, the altar itself would have been covered with blood countless times. What did such a practice yield in the physical world for the onlookers to see?

The following is what they would have noticed. When blood covers an object, it hardens and becomes a shell. This blood would have piled up year after year, not only over the altar, but also over the Ark of the Covenant and many other sacred objects as well. The altar would have developed a shell of caked blood of incredible thickness due to the blood being poured over it. This means that if

a person had offered the sacrifice through the priest, the blood of that animal would have mixed with the blood of the other animals already on the altar. Essentially, it would become a part of it in a way that could not be ignored. For scriptural reference, we can look at Leviticus Chapter 16 as an example of what this process looked like overall.

Every time the person who had presented the offering walked past that altar, they would likely look and remember that their sins needed to be dealt with permanently in some way. The blood-covered altar was a visible daily reminder to everyone that they were all guilty before the law in one way or another. Therefore, atonement is the memorialization of sin so that it cannot be forgotten, just like a headstone is a way to memorialize someone who has passed away and serves as a physical marker of remembrance.

In short, atonement, being a form of remembrance, is the exact opposite of forgiveness. It was understood that one day, God would appear in the flesh and blood of a man and wash away their sins with His own blood, remembering them no more. So instead of preserving sins as a memorial, His blood would cleanse them from the altar of the Cross. Therefore, the old temple altar served not only as a memorial of human depravity, but also as a road sign pointing ahead to the hope that was to come in the forgiveness provided by the Messiah.

(Propitiation/Forgiveness)

What is forgiveness? In short, forgiveness is the exact opposite of atonement. It is the total washing away of sins—past, present, and future—so that they will be remembered no more. In the book of Psalms, as well as in other passages throughout the Bible, we can see the hope of this forgiveness being prophesied as well as longed for. Psalm 103:12 (ESV) states, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.”*

It was understood, going back to Genesis, that the Messiah would come and redeem humanity. At the exact moment when God curses the serpent, which was a heavenly being and not an earthly snake, as well as the woman and the man, God also declares the road map to forgiveness and redemption through His own offspring. For it is total forgiveness that makes redemption possible. Jesus has forgiven the sins of the whole world—both past, present, and future. Even the sins of the unbeliever who goes to the grave are forgiven.

Yet, this does not mean the *unbeliever* is saved. Belief here refers to trust in the Lord Jesus for the restoration of the relationship with the Holy Spirit that was lost in Adam when he rebelled against God. When Adam revolted, he essentially divorced the Holy Spirit through his rebellion. It is the return of the Holy Spirit through accepting what Jesus did for us that allows the relationship to be

restored and the divorce to end. For when Adam sinned, the Holy Spirit departed. Yet through Christ, the relationship can now be restored, since there is now no sin for which the Holy Spirit will ever leave us.

However, there has to be a willingness to receive a relationship with God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If a person does not do this, though their sins are forgiven through Christ, just as the whole world's sins are forgiven, they still won't be saved if they reject that relationship with the Lord Jesus. God won't force anyone to be with Him if they don't want to be. All sins are indeed forgiven, but not all those who are absolved desire a relationship with God. They are forgiven but still spiritually dead, for it is the Holy Spirit that is indeed the spirit of LIFE! This isn't just in reference to the restoration of immortality after the resurrection to come; it's also a restoration of purpose as royal sons and daughters of the Most High God. Life with God is indeed life! Life without God for all eternity is no real life at all.

There are many false teachers who will try to tell a person that though their sins were forgiven by Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit might still depart from them if they continue to sin. This is, of course, a lie from the devil. The Apostle Paul has already addressed this falsehood, and it is further discussed throughout Scripture in many different places. Paul tells us in Romans 7 that the law was given in order to stir up sins. In other words, those

looking to the law to save them find that the spirit of sin weaponizes the law to make sin seem more taboo and therefore desirable. This isn't the fault of the law; rather, it is the fault of the spirit of sin. We know from Scripture that behind that spirit are wicked fallen beings from hell who are trying to use the allure of the taboo to their advantage.

Paul said that if it had not been for the spirit of sin trying to make bad things look good, he probably wouldn't have been interested in doing some of them. Yet, the spirit of sin makes these forbidden elements look more enticing than they really are. He spoke here using the concept of coveting as an example. He said that if it had not been for the law, he might not even have known that coveting was bad. In fact, he goes further to tell us that he might have even been able to dress up the concept of coveting to look like something that was indeed good! But the law steps in to tell him that coveting is certainly wrong. Then the spirit of sin steps in behind to try to make coveting appear more interesting.

He then goes on to explain that even when he tries to do good, evil is always with him. And just so that we are not confused, he elaborates on this. He says that when he wants to do good, he ends up doing evil. He does the very thing that he doesn't want to do. Likewise, he does it so often that it is even predictable. Furthermore, he knows that this is the spirit of sin but can't overcome it.

Paul conveys both his reasonable frustration and good hope when he says, *“Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* He goes on to say, *“I thank God that there is a way out through Christ Jesus our Lord!”* He says this because the law can save no one, and that should be obvious. After all, the law is like a mirror. We can see ourselves in the mirror and recognize that we are dirty. Yet the Law-Mirror can’t wash away anything, nor is it designed to. Instead, “we go to the water” which is the blood of Christ, and are permanently cleansed. His blood is our water, and His grace is our wash cloth. We will never be dirty again.

Our temporary condition can be frustrating because we are still living in a fallen world, with corrupted bodies that cannot be truly ruled. But one day we will have bodies that will conform to the will of God, working alongside our own will to do what is right by nature. After the resurrection, there will no longer be a conflict between spirit and flesh. This is the hope of the glory to come and the even greater glory that awaits us. After all, we will be made like Jesus, in whom there is no flaw or darkness. As children of the Most High God, we will carry His will and authority into all creation in ways that we can’t even imagine.

In 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV), the Apostle Paul reminds us that, *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart*

of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” Paul explained to us, however, that the law was never intended to be bad in any manner. Instead, the law was meant to constrain evil to some degree, so that humanity would not totally self-implode before the Messiah could come to forgive our sins and then, in turn, send the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell us. There's so much more that needs to be said here, but I don't want to derail or move too far off from the subject of forgiveness and redemption.

Freedom From Guilt And Shame

Let's now tie together the previous topics by making a segue into the concept of guilt and shame, why they are different, and why we do not have to live with either of them in Christ Jesus. Guilt is a matter of status before the law. For example, if I find myself breaking the speed limit on a roadway, I can receive a traffic ticket because I've broken the law. In other words, I am guilty before the law, and there is a penalty. Guilt is, of course, a matter of legal status.

When I commit a sin, I'm also guilty before God's law. The difference here is that Jesus Christ is the judge in the courtroom and pays my debt for me. He does so because it's too much for me to pay, and I have nothing to offer that is sufficient. The price is so high that I can't even work off the debt. Justice is still served because restitution was made by Him for what I did. The judge himself paid my bill out of His own pocket. In the case of all of our sins, the judge paid our bill with His own blood as the currency.

Whether we use the ticket analogy or the commission of an actual sin, do I have to feel ashamed in either case? What is shame? Shame does not come from God. Shame is an emotion rather than a legal status. It is a tool that the enemy uses to make a person feel as though they are worthless in the sight of God. Believe

me, our enemy, the accuser, would like nothing more than for us to feel worthless.

You see, when we feel worthless, we look for things to bring us comfort and reprieve from that horrible feeling. If we believe the lie from hell that God still secretly holds our sins against us and fall into the idolatry of legalism, then we put ourselves at the mercy of the enemy rather than the mercy of God! If a person feels that every time they commit a sin, the Lord our God rejects them and is secretly disappointed in them, then they are going to seek comfort from somewhere.

They do so because of the pain of rejection that they now feel. Even though this rejection is not real, it becomes real enough in our minds, though certainly not in God's eyes. Yet still, if we believe the lie that we are rejected, then of course we're going to think it's true, because we forget that our judge is also Jesus, who loves us and paid for everything.

Nevertheless, shame works to send a person into a spiral, where they find themselves committing that particular sin which brings them temporary comfort because they believe the lie that God is disappointed in them. They're engaging in this spiral not because they are rejecting God themselves, but rather because they are seeking relief from the rejection they wrongly believe is there. They often buy into this rejection narrative

because of false teachers from the devil himself preaching false gospels. That false gospel says, *“Come unto me, all you who are heavy laden, and I will make judgment.”*

The Scripture tells us that not only are our sins no longer remembered by God, but that He will not reject us because of them. He knows our broken condition, and the fullness of our glory has not yet come. The fullness will come at the resurrection. Even though it has already started, the fullness is not yet. Paul said this is what we are hoping for, and our hope is not in vain. God said it will happen, so it will happen. God has never lied to us. There is no darkness in God. He is truly the Father of lights, and He loves to help.

In addition, God cannot be disappointed in us. God, who is the eternal being who made everything and exists as the Holy Trinity, has never once been disappointed and never will be. This may seem like a bold statement, but please bear with me. The reason why God cannot be disappointed is this: disappointment comes from a person expecting one thing to happen and then being surprised when it either doesn't go as expected or something else happens in its place.

God, however, is all-knowing! Because God is all-knowing, He knows all things real and possible. There is nothing that you, or I are going to do today, tomorrow, or

in the future that God isn't aware of. He knew all of those things when He hung on the cross, and He delivered us from the consequences of those things when He shed His blood there. Furthermore, He also rose from the dead to let us know that He has conquered everything, including our brokenness and our sins. He will never let anything come between Himself and us. This includes our own worst behavior. This is the truth that the devil never wants you to know.

Of course, we certainly do not have a license to commit sin. So since all of our sins are forgiven—past, present, and future—and God no longer holds our sins against us, why shouldn't we all just go out and sin like the devil? It's because even though Scripture tells us that all things are lawful, it also says that not all things are edifying. In other words, just because we can do it and not pay an eternal price for it doesn't mean that it's something that's building us up if it's wrong to do. If I commit sin, I either hurt myself or someone else in the process. For example, I could choose to abuse the temple that I live in with anything from cupcakes to methamphetamines starting tomorrow. Now, it's lawful for me to do so since I'm under grace. Yet, is it edifying? Does eating cupcakes to the point of diabetes produce anything beneficial in my life? If I smoke meth until I'm a complete skeleton, does that help me? Of course not! Nor does it help anyone around me!

So now we try to avoid sin where we can because it isn't productive and certainly never has been. But we're not avoiding sin because God's going to judge us for it when we are in Christ! God already took the judgment upon Himself. So be careful not to allow the false doctrine that God is still going to punish us in the hereafter for doing something wrong tomorrow to worm its way in. If you do that and give in, you open the door to the spiral of shame. You are still not going to go to hell for it, but what the devil will do is use that spiral of shame to waste your time, your thoughts, and your energy. Those resources can be used somewhere else in a more productive way. Don't let the enemy con you out of them.

If we're always down on ourselves about all of our faults all the time, then what we're really doing is trying to atone for our sins through emotion. We're trying to punish ourselves and remember the very sins that God has already forgotten. Once you realize that God truly doesn't hold your sins against you, liberation from tyranny and shame is yours. It always has been. Never wander in the wilderness of shame. God wants you to enter His rest. As you rest in Him, shame begins losing its hold, and the spiral trap becomes less of a time thief in your life. This is true for all of us! This is summarized in Romans 8 (ESV): *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."*

Faith And Works

As a person studies Scripture, at some point they will come to the book of James and be confronted with what might, on the surface, appear to be James suggesting that salvation is dependent on a combination of faith plus works. Let's first read over these passages and then discuss why this is not what James was asserting, despite what some might suppose.

James 2:14-26 (ESV): *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as

righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God. You see, that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way, was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."

One of the reasons why people read these passages in James and assume that he is mixing faith and works as a formula for salvation, is that they are focusing on something other than the point that James was actually making. James was not suggesting that, without works, our faith is dead in God's eyes. Rather, his focus was on the eyes of the person who is in need of physical help, whose needs are being ignored by the believer. It is about how that suffering person perceives the follower of Christ as having a dead or meaningless faith.

In other words, if we neglect the needs of those around us while asserting ourselves as followers of Christ, those people in need will look at us as though our faith is dead. In short, our faith in Christ, however honest and truthful it is, does no good in the life of the person being shunned. To them, our faith, even when it is real, is meaningless to the one who is hurting since we are not allowing our trust in God to aid them in their own tribulation. So when James says that *"faith without works is dead,"* he is

referring to the perception of those who are in need but being neglected, not God's perception of us personally. Unfortunately, most read through those passages without paying attention to the scenario James offered, and then build entire false theologies around their misperception.

This is why there are certain Christian denominations that falsely believe the devil's lie that they must engage in works in order to either earn or maintain salvation. Yet, this performance ideology is the same sermon that the devil preached to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Sadly, many to this very day continue to fall for this lie because they read the word of God through the lens of false doctrine, rather than paying attention to what the Holy Spirit is actually saying.

The moment anyone attempts to add merit, works, performance, the restraint of the flesh, or anything of themselves to the work of the cross, they are essentially spitting in the face of the Lord Jesus and what He has done for them. It is an insult to the Lord of glory to suggest that what He did for us is not sufficient on its own. God does not need our help. The Holy Spirit tells us through the Apostle Paul the following: *Ephesians 2:10*, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* If we read the full chapter in Ephesians, and essentially the entire book of Ephesians,

we will be able to distinguish what the works are that Paul was talking about specifically.

The works that Paul was emphasizing are a different kind that has nothing to do with our performance or merit. If you focus on the entire book, you will understand that Paul is talking about the works of God Himself in us, and not the works that we do for God or even for others. Essentially, we are saved, and we are saved unto good works, which are the works that God is doing in our spirit in terms of maturing us. This has nothing to do with us performing tasks.

The maturing that is spoken of in the book of Corinthians is what the Apostle Paul refers to, the quickening of our spirit. This is a growth process through which we come to know our God and essentially grow up in Him as new creations in Christ. After all, we are His children, and children grow. This was an aspect of what Paul further expounded on in the book of Ephesians, as we just read. Let no one deceive you: our faith without works is dead to those who are in need, but our faith, if we think it is based on our works, is totally dead to God. The word "faith" really does mean trust. We have to trust that what Christ has done for us is enough, or we cannot receive His Holy Spirit. Without His Holy Spirit, we may be alive to the world, but we will be dead to Christ.

This is why we are told in other passages to rest in God and what He has already done for us, and not to rebel as the children of Israel did, which led them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. They rebelled by refusing to believe what God said was true. In our case, if we refuse to believe that what He has done is enough for us, then we, too, are in rebellion. A person who is in rebellion in this way will be tossed by the waves of the ocean, trying to grasp onto any false doctrine that they think will keep them afloat. The irony is that the Lord Jesus is right there with His hand out, simply waiting for them to decide to let Him pull them into the boat by His own power and not theirs.

Another reason why some will want to reject the notion that their performance, their constraint of the flesh, or other forms of self-righteousness aren't aiding their salvation is that they really don't want to give God the true glory. In other instances, it's because they simply don't trust God and what He has done to be enough. Sadly, even though the Lord has done everything necessary for our salvation on His own, many simply refuse to accept His work on the cross in favor of their own.

Nevertheless, we don't have to live in that kind of self-inflicted confusion. We can trust in our God! The Lord Jesus loves us. We have done nothing and can do nothing to earn His love because His unconditional love

is, by definition, truly unconditional. The very moment we recognize that we have a need to be forgiven for our sins and that there is nothing we can do about it, and we turn to the Lord Jesus putting our trust in Him, at that moment we really are saved.

We are saved because we acknowledge what He has already done for us, and He will indwell us with His Holy Spirit immediately. Once that happens, a person truly becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old man or woman that we were really does die. We will wrestle with some of the leftovers of our behaviors until we leave this earth, but the old person really is dead. On the other hand, we, as new creations in Christ, are now dead to the world but alive to Him. We are dead to the world in that it has no interest in our edification, and we are alive to Christ because He lives in us directly.

A person may think to themselves that they don't feel like a new creation. At my age, I can certainly understand that, especially now that my body is not very youthful. Nevertheless, it is a mistake for us to allow our feelings, or lack thereof, to be our guide. Our feelings are certainly important; God gave them to us for many good reasons. Yet here in the flesh, in this fallen world, our bodies are no longer in the state of perfection that the bodies of Adam and Eve were in the Garden before the fall.

Now, our feelings are often dependent on how much sleep we did or did not get the night before. They are often affected by what we have eaten or whether we have the right nutrition. Our bodies can get sick and sometimes injured, which will impact how we feel about many things. Feelings are important. If it's physical pain, it can be very important to pay attention to that kind of feeling. If we are talking about emotions, our emotions are largely dependent on what we are thinking about at the time we have certain specific thoughts. Yet our emotions are downstream of what we think, and not necessarily based on reality.

For example, if I'm under the perception that nobody loves me, I could start to feel very depressed. But just because my perception might be that no one loves me, does that mean my perception is truly accurate? I am convinced that even if everybody in my life abandoned me tomorrow, there will be at least one person who will not: that person is the living God! God will not abandon me because I'm such a great individual; I can assure you I'm not. Instead, He won't abandon me because He has promised that He won't abandon any of us. He is the one who is faithful and true. Yet, if I don't dwell on the reality—that the Lord won't abandon me—then my emotions will react instead to whatever else I might be thinking or believing, even if what I'm thinking or believing about my condition isn't true.

Summary:

Here are the key elements that I hope you, as the reader, take away from all of this: The Lord Jesus loves you! The Lord accepts you. He does not hold your sins against you. This means that He does not count your past sins, your present sins, or the sins you will commit in the future as reasons to punish or reject you. When the Lord our God looks at you, He sees His perfection in you because the work He did on the cross was perfect. His sacrifice as the Lord Jesus is perfect and is more than sufficient to cover you completely, inside and out, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

He knows that you are still in a condition where you deal with the person you were before He made you into a new creation. He does not condemn you for that. He didn't even condemn the old person that you once were. He died for you even before you became His child. If He was willing to do that for someone who was not at that time His child, imagine how much more He can do for you now that you are His. He has given you and I everything we need for life and godliness because He has given us Himself. He told Abraham that He, the Lord God, would be Abraham's reward. Abraham believed everything that God promised him, and God accounted it to Abraham as righteousness.

In other words, being right with God is simply believing that what God tells us really is true. That truth is that He loves you, and as the book of Romans tells us, there is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. The Lord is not looking to punish you. Even the discipline of God has nothing to do with punishment, but rather with training and preparation to deal with the conditions of life. God's discipline is more akin to a soldier training to fight an enemy in the world, rather than a disobedient child being punished for wrongdoing.

There truly is no sin that the Lord holds against you. When the enemy of this world attempts to tell you otherwise, you must put on the full armor of God and use the sword of truth against him. Do not be afraid to confront the lies of the devil with the sword of truth that Christ Jesus has given you. You are greatly loved. You've done nothing to merit that, and neither have I. We can't merit the unconditional love that is, by definition, unconditional. What we can do is acknowledge the truth of the Gospel and trust in the fact that what the Lord Jesus has done for us truly is enough. Once you realize that and begin to internalize that truth, you will learn to live in His rest, one day at a time. Remember, salvation is instant upon belief, as we've discussed prior to all of this. Yet, living in His rest daily is a process that a person will continue to learn until the day they leave this world, if they are willing to learn it.

Nevertheless, a person who is saved but is afraid to live in His rest will still enter the kingdom of heaven, but they will have wasted their entire life worrying for no reason. Do not let the enemy of this world waste your time in that way. Jesus loves you; He has the final word and is The Word. You have nothing to fear when you are in the Lord, and that is the word on the streets of heaven.

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